



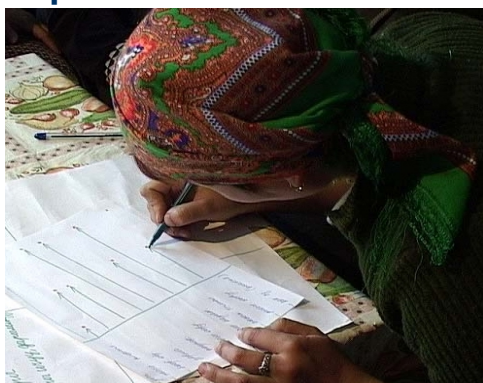
USAID
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KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

SUCCESS STORY

Communities Mobilize to Improve Health

USAID empowers rural communities in Kyrgyzstan to plan and carry out actions to improve their health.



A primary health care worker helps a village to identify and prioritize their health issues.
Photo: ZdravPlus

“People are now starting to fully understand that they need to do something themselves to stay healthy and not totally rely on medical workers.”

Kuban Ashimkanov, the leader of a village health committee in Ak-Suu Rayon.

The USAID ZdravPlus project is collaborating with the Ministry of Health of Kyrgyzstan and other donors to empower rural communities to improve their health. In the past year, ZdravPlus helped rural communities in Issyk-Kul Oblast identify and prioritize health issues, form 165 village health committees, and begin a series of health actions aimed at increasing individual and community responsibility for health. The first such health action focused on iodine deficiency and led to increased awareness and an expanded availability of iodized salt in the Issyk-Kul Oblast communities.

The community action process started with the analysis of health issues in each community and the establishment of village health committees to plan, implement, and coordinate health improvement initiatives in accordance with the identified priority health issues. With assistance from the USAID project, rayon health promotion units and primary health care workers facilitated the analysis, helped establish health committees, and trained their members to address the identified health issues and to manage the committee work.

A key concern identified during the initial analysis in most villages was the prevalence of goiter and other iodine deficiency diseases. In response, primary health care facility staff and village health committee representatives were trained on the importance of using iodized salt to prevent these diseases. Village health committees then began campaigns on iodized salt in their villages, educating the residents of their communities about the impact of iodized salt on their health and explaining how to store iodized salt properly to retain its medicinal qualities. The committees are also routinely checking the iodine levels in household salt and the salt sold in local shops using quick and easy-to-use test kits. In addition, the majority of shops in cities and rural villages were equipped with test kits to check iodine content in the salt they buy from distributors and sell to consumers. The village health committees test salt in the shops every month, so all villagers now have the right to ask shops to show that the salt they buy has been tested.

Increased population awareness and improved accountability of shopkeepers toward their clients have resulted in a dramatic increase in the percentage of iodized salt being sold throughout the oblast – from 62% at the beginning of the campaign in March to 85% half-a-year later. Kuban Ashimkanov, the leader of one of the most active village health committees in Ak-Suu rayon, feels that such activities are extremely important to the rural communities: “People are now starting to fully understand that they need to do something themselves to stay healthy and not totally rely on medical workers.”